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March 8, 2019

The Honorable Kirstjen M. Nielsen  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
Department of Homeland Security  
1880 2nd Street SW  
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Secretary Nielsen,

I write to express grave concern regarding reports that the Department of Homeland Security has built a secret watch list targeting journalists, lawyers, and activists who work on issues related to immigrant rights.<sup>1</sup>

According to a recent report from NBC San Diego, the Department of Homeland Security is running a program that has compiled detailed dossiers on 47 journalists, attorneys, and activists working to protect asylum seekers and refugees.<sup>2</sup> For example, according to news reports, the dossier on prominent immigrant rights attorney Nicole Ramos includes specifics about "the car she drives, her mother's name, and her work and travel history."<sup>3</sup> People placed on this list were apparently flagged for additional screening when traveling, and otherwise targeted for special attention by law enforcement.<sup>4</sup>

The Department of Homeland Security must immediately dismantle any program that seeks to target journalists, attorneys, and activists in this way. The protection of journalists is fundamental to the health of our democracy, and the media serves as an important safeguard against government overreach and abuse. In addition, while this administration has a disturbing history of harassing immigration attorneys,<sup>5</sup> these lawyers serve a critical public function,

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Jones, Mari Payton and Bill Feather, *Source: Leaked Documents Show the U.S. Government Tracking Journalists and Immigration Advocates Through a Secret Database* NBC (Mar. 6 2019) <https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/Source-Leaked-Documents-Show-the-US-Government-Tracking-Journalists-and-Advocates-Through-a-Secret-Database-506783231.html>

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> See Rachel B. Tiven, *The Airport Lawyers Who Stood Up to Trump Are Under Attack*, (May 19 2017) <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-airport-lawyers-who-stood-up-to-trump-are-under-attack/>; *Northwest*

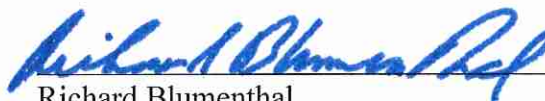
particularly given this administration's sustained attacks on immigrants. Finally, activism has a proud place in our country's history, and no one should be placed on a watch list simply because they care about the fate of families fleeing for their lives.

Placing journalists, attorneys, and activists on a watch list may be a favorite move of one of the many autocratic rulers this President counts as a friend, but it is not a move we should tolerate in our democracy. Given the nature of these disturbing reports, I urgently request that you write to respond to the following information requests by no later than close of business on March 22:

- Please provide a list of all officials involved in approving and running the Department of Homeland Security's program targeting journalists, attorneys, and activists.
- Please provide all memos, reports, and messages related to the creation and running of this program.
- Please provide a full and complete description of the nature of the dossiers that the Department of Homeland Security is compiling. Please include a detailed description of the type of information included in these dossiers.
- Please provide a complete list of each law enforcement action taken against people detailed on the dossiers. For the purposes of this list, a law enforcement action includes additional screening or interviews.
- Please explain when you first learned about the existence of this program.
- Please respond with a date on which you can provide a staff level briefing regarding this program.

Thank you for your attention to these urgent information requests. Please reply to Adam Bradlow at [Adam\\_Bradlow@blumenthal.senate.gov](mailto:Adam_Bradlow@blumenthal.senate.gov).

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senate